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ABSTRACT

The Kohanga Reo, or "language nest" centers, provide places where Maori children can learn their native language. In its partnership with Te Kohanga Reo, the New Zealand Early Intervention Service has: (1) sent representatives to Maori tribal committee meetings; (2) ensured Kohanga Reo representation on early intervention management teams; (3) provided in-service training for teachers; (4) worked with local health care professionals in the treatment of ear disease in children under 3 years of age and the education of these children about the disease; and (5) provided workshops for local people on teaching children with special needs. Some issues of concern in the partnership with Te Kohanga Reo include the constraint of government regulations on Kohanga Reos' operations; the need for Maori language materials; and the need for more bilingual classes. Issues relating to children with special needs include teaching special needs children through all their senses; providing them with more guidance during play than is given to other children; and encouraging Maori applicants to enroll in a college course on the education of special needs children. (BC)

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EARLY INTERVENTION AND TE KOHANGA REO

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Paper delivered to the Fifth Early Childhood Convention

DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND
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Presented by

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E Nga whaea

Nga mihi maha kia koutou aku hoa

E koa ana taku nga kau kei konei maua

Ko Hori, Ko Lindy, i tenei hui.

Greetings to you my colleagues

My heart is indeed happy to be here with

George and Lindy at this Convention.

I come from Northland, Te Hiku o te ika a Maui, the tail of the fish of Maui.

As the tail of the fish moves so does the rest of the fish follow, and it is no accident that we are here today speaking about our partnership with Kohanga Reo, because it was Sir James Henare, the Ngapuhi from Kawiti in the North, who, with Mrs Tilly Reedy from Ngati Porou first had the idea of Te Kohanga Reo – or language nest – the place where the young children would learn the Maori language, and stand tall with pride in themselves and their people.

The Kohanga Reo movement is one of the greatest influences on Maori infants and young children growing up in Aotearoa in the 1990's. At present, there are roughly 2,000 children attending 87 Kohanga Reo Centres in the Tai Tokerau District. It can, therefore be expected that about 200 of those children will have special needs at some time during their early childhood years. Understanding and enhancing the needs of these children and their families can have beneficial effects on a sizeable proportion of Maori Society and, consequently, on New Zealand as a whole.

I work for the Special Education Service as the District Adviser in Early Intervention catering for the needs of families and teachers where there is a young child with special needs.

The partnership between the Early Intervention Service and Nga Kohanga Reo in Northland has proceeded along various channels.

1. Our Amokura, Don Ngawati, organised for representatives from our Special Education Service District Management Team and local Field Staff to be invited to attend the Runanga Meetings of all the District Tribal Committees – 13 in all. These meetings, which were usually held on the local marae, gave us an opportunity to hear local concerns. Issues raised were their children's language, problems imposed by isolation, resentment at not being able to have a say and a distrust of Pakehas going in and telling them of what's good for them.

We let the people know

who we were

what we did

how we could assist them help their children with special needs

Our message to them,

"We have transport and will travel – to work with

individuals or groups, in homes, in Kohanga Reo or other early childhood settings."

We had great difficulty in explaining that we were NOT the Ministry of Education.

2. We have worked with the Iwi Transition Agency to ensure Kohanga Reo representation on all our Early Intervention Management Teams.

3. We were delighted to have 3 Kaiako selected for the Towards Inclusion Programme. This was a national inservice training for regular teachers to help in the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream education, and gave teachers skills in problem solving, writing Individual Developmental Plans, and practical help and support through networking with S.E.S. staff and other teachers.
4. Glen Stephens, our Adviser on Deaf Children, is doing some splendid work with the local health professionals on the Glue Ear Programme. This problem is rife in Northland, and the combination of education and treatment targeting the under 3's through the Kohanga Reo is already having spectacular results.
5. Some of our Early Intervention Staff and I worked with George Cherrington in providing a series of workshops for the Kaiako and Kaiawhina in the Whangarei area on topics related to the identification and teaching of children with special needs. This scheme is about to be extended into the Mid and Far North regions.

The whole process of working with the Kaiako and Kaiawhina has been very exciting for me. They picked up the ideas up very quickly and we shared many worthwhile experiences.

I have since been and visited some of their Kohanga Reo and I am impressed to see the creative ways the workshop ideas are being put into practice.

However, we are still at the icebreaking stage – there is much to learn.

I will now comment on some issues of concern.

I fear the administration of the regulations will straight jacket the whole movement. Kohanga Reo are being forced to make changes in buildings, equipment and programmes which are contrary to their kaupapa.

We need a person on our Early Intervention Staff who has a knowledge and understanding of Tikanga of Tikanga Maori, preferably a fluent Maori speaker. This would obviously improve communication between S.E.S. and the Tangata Whenua.

There are issues in the language area. When Rosemary Hargreaves was Acting District Speech Language Therapist earlier this year, she noted that speech-language therapy assessment and programme materials are all in English – there is a need to formulate tests and programmes which reflect cultural differences and where appropriate, in Maori.

Rosemary also identified that a child with a language difficulty will have a problem in every language. It's hard to expect such a child to learn more than one language. Care needs to be taken to choose the most appropriate language as the teaching medium. This can create a dilemma in some situations, particularly if a child is taught Maori in the Kohanga Reo, and English is spoken at home.

Some parents want English for their children as well, and some are afraid their children will feel lost when they start primary school. There are a growing number of bilingual and total immersion classes now operating in Northland schools. Gordon Dryden reporting on Total Immersion Classes on television the other night showed that these children pick up the major language within about one year. Further more he reported on a serious

breakdown in communication in families where the mother tongue is not taught, as the generation cease to talk to each other.

My focus with regard to the Kohanga Reo is catering effectively for the learning of children with special needs.

This means setting up the learning environment so that these children are exposed to experiences that are meaningful and relevant to the child's life and developmental age. So that they utilise all their senses. Not only what they see and hear, taste, touch, and smell. Bob Samples in his book "Open Mind Whole Mind" talks about other senses through which children learn – temperature, pain, repetitive movement, imagery etc.

Rita Walker in her inspiring workshop showed how Kohanga Reo kaupapa utilised nature and the universe as it's curriculum. Children need to talk about the things they touch, and the things they experience. The resulting language becomes a functional language leading to creative ideas. Children can talk about "What happens next", "What if", rather than just the rote learning of colours and numbers.

So they are encouraged to interact with people and objects.

Although I believe in self-motivated play, and that children should be given opportunities to make choices, children with disabilities need more guidance, encouragement and specialised teaching. They need accepting and loving staff, and accept children Kohanga Reo certainly do. Show me a Kohanga Reo that refuses entry to a child because he is too young or too old,

resources not in place, no letter from the association, no psychologists report
..... etc etc.

I believe that the local Tino Rangatiratanga are looking to designate a suitable person to specialise in special needs for Te Kohanga Reo that we can help to train.

At present in Tai Tokerau there is a recognition that with the education of children with special needs, it's in the best interests of the children, and their families to use people who have the skills and experience, no matter what their culture.

I would hope that we can encourage suitable Maori applicants to do the "Education of Children with Special Needs in Early Childhood" Course at Auckland Teachers' College – so that in the future they can design their own services.

My vision is that the partnership will deepen, and strengthen, as I still have much to learn, about aroha, mana, manaki, mauri and wairua. The Tangata whenua have gifts and insights which I am only just beginning to understand.

KARAKIA

E tupu e rea

I nga ra o te Ao

Ko tou ringaringa

Ki nga rakau o te Pakeha

Hei oranga mo tou tinana

Ko tou wairua

Ki te Atua

Nana nei nga mea Katoa

Grow o tender child in the days of your world

Your hands to the implements of the Pakeha

As a way of life for your body

Your spirit to the Almighty God who is the giver
of all things.

Noho ora mai a tutaki noa a te wa